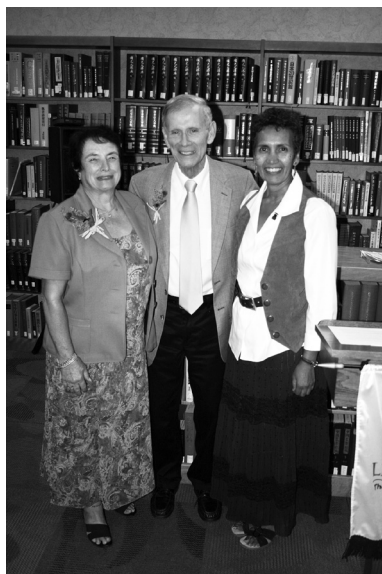


George and Me – Fifty Years of a Wonderful Life

Eleanor Woodyard



Eleanor and George Woodyard with Lorraine Haricombe, Dean of KU Libraries.

George and I were teaching at high schools in the Chicago area in April of 1960. I was invited to a faculty party at George's school, but since my date was the square dance caller, George asked me to dance with him. That was the first and only time we ever square danced together. It took him four days to call me, but I was pleased when he asked me out for the following weekend. That first weekend, we visited the city's arboretum, which was a very beautiful area (funny how an arboretum played a role in our later life), and then I met George's graduate school roommate, Bob Hartmann, who subsequently joined us for so many of our later theatre adventures. In May, just several weeks later, George asked me to marry him and two months later we were married on July

31, 1960. He took me on a month-long honeymoon through Mexico with stops in Saltillo, San Luis Potosí, Mexico City, Cuernavaca, Acapulco, Toluca, Tenancingo, Mérida, Morelia, Potzcuero, the island of Janitzio, Zamora, Guadalajara, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, Durango, Chihuahua, Juárez, and El Paso. That whirlwind was my introduction to Mexico, a place that we would revisit so many times during our life. I'd never studied a foreign language, and as an Illinois farm girl I hadn't seen a need for another language. However, George, who was also an Illinois farm boy, loved languages and foreign cultures, and we enjoyed all the opportunities that they provided.

In 1961, George got an offer to teach at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois, which had been his undergraduate school. After teaching Spanish there for two years, he knew that he needed to get his Ph.D. In 1963, we moved to Urbana, Illinois, as George received a fellowship at the University of Illinois, and he studied with Merlin Forster. During this time, even though we had two little ones, Shana and Lance, I was able to continue with some substitute teaching as a high school physical education teacher.

In 1966, George accepted a position at the University of Kansas as a Spanish professor, which was a great decision for us. The following summer, with three little kids (Devon was just nine months old), we left for KU's Summer Institute in Guadalajara. It was a real adventure as we had no arranged housing, and we'd not had any experience living in another country, but we found a great house with a maid who loved our little blond kids and who took good care of us. We spent five summers in Guadalajara and I enjoyed the other faculty (Don and Marty Schmidt, Dan and Nancy Reedy, and Stella Clark), all the graduate students, and our family and friends who visited us. By our second Mexican summer, we'd had our fourth child, Kenda, and there were so many memorable situations that occurred as our family lived and traveled with varying numbers of people on all of our Mexican adventures.

George's interest in Latin American theatre widened our world experiences even further. In 1967, I remember George and Fred Litto sitting at our dining room table as they planned the LATR. George began to travel to theatre conferences all over Latin America, and many of those involved in theatre subsequently visited us here. We held receptions at our home any time there were visitors, and at one point, we were hosting receptions about twice a month. In 1982, George and I hosted his first International Theatre Conference, and we so enjoyed all the festivities that occurred during those occasions. In 1989, George became the first Dean of International Studies at KU, which opened up opportunities for both of us to travel around the world. I loved meeting new people and experiencing many new places. George was the perfect tour companion as he loved doing the research and planning the trips and learning the useful phrases in other languages. (He spent a year learning Turkish in anticipation of a trip we ultimately weren't able to take.) He traveled to over 110 countries (he figured it was only about half of the countries of the world), but he wasn't interested in return visits, so I didn't get to go to Russia or China with him. However, my traveling bug has not disappeared, so I ventured out on my first solo trip to China in October of 2012.

Local concerns also occupied much of our combined attention. George's interests included the Rotary's Arboretum and the campaign for a new building for the Lawrence theatre group. We both served in many offices in our Lutheran church. Additionally, I was involved in the kids' schools, and I have been involved in the League of Women Voters for many years. We both enjoyed spending time on our home; we designed the house, and we planned and built ponds and gardens for flowers and vegetables. For over ten years, one of our favorite events was our annual Grandparents Camp which we held for our eight grandchildren. The grandkids have so enjoyed spending the time together that I have continued to have camp for the past two years, but Grandpa's presence and wonderful stories have been sadly missed. While I too continue to miss George deeply, I'm grateful for all the wonderful life experiences we had during our fifty years together.

